

STRATEGY
RESEARCH
PROJECT

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**UNITED STATES STRATEGY FOR THE FULLEST POSSIBLE
ACCOUNTING OF U.S. COMBATANTS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA**

BY

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UNITED STATES AWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

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April 30, 1998 marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of the fall of Saigon. At the close of the Vietnam War, the United States had lost 58,183 soldiers with 2,583 Americans unaccounted for. Since withdrawing from Southeast Asia (SEA), the U. S. government has sustained an unprecedented effort to achieve the fullest possible accounting for those lost. Currently 2,079 UNITED STATES servicemen remain unaccounted for in SEA, 1552 of those in Vietnam. Although the United States has tried to maintain a diplomatic dialogue with the Vietnamese government, we have not maintained a consistent policy.

This study examines the effectiveness of the current United States diplomatic strategy of engagement, especially the goal of promoting Vietnamese cooperation in assisting our efforts to achieve the fullest possible accounting for Americans missing in action (MIAs). It demonstrates that U. S. National Security Strategy with Vietnam has enhanced efforts to achieve the fullest possible accounting.

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PREFACE

On 22 January 1966 Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 35th Infantry, 4th Infantry Division was conducting combat operations in an area near Pleiku Province, South Vietnam. While moving through the area with Alpha Company, Sp4 Douglas A. Ross, a radiotelephone operator from Headquarters Company, came under heavy sniper and grenade attack. Opposing forces shot Sp4 Ross in the head, and members of his unit confirmed his death. The tactical situation forced the unit to withdraw without retrieving his body. The following day, U.S. forces searched the area but failed to locate Sp4 Ross' body.

In August 1997, Vietnamese officials notified me that two Vietnamese citizens had discovered the possible remains of an American serviceman near Gia Lai Province (formerly Pleiku). After initially investigating the automated database, I determined these were possibly the remains of a lost soldier. The computer search identified several ground losses within the area surrounding Pleiku. Immediately, I prepared to dispatch an investigation team lead by CW4 Clyde Green (USA). His team would meet with the local officials, interview the witnesses, and examine the personal effects and remains found by the two Vietnamese. If these remains were positively identified, CW4 Green would instruct the Vietnamese government officials to transport the soldier to Hanoi. The mission to recover the remains would be difficult. The site was located deep in the jungle of the Central Highlands. It was the monsoon season and bad weather prevented the use of a helicopter. The team would have to drive to the provincial capital and hike through the jungle to the location. CW4 Green's team consisted of MSgt Ron Ward, the assistant team leader and USAF linguist: HM1 Thomas

Revaz, a Navy SEAL medic, and Dr. Richard Harrington, anthropologist.

On 6 August 1997, the team met with the local government representatives and the witnesses. The team had been fortunate, the witnesses, without instructions, had obligingly brought the remains with all personal effects to the provincial mortuary. After interviewing the witnesses, collecting the personal effects (which included dog tags), Dr. Harrington examined the remains. As the team and the Vietnamese intensely observed the examination Dr. Harrington finally exclaimed, "Welcome home Ross!"

During a repatriation ceremony in Hanoi, September 1997, I had the honor and privilege to accept on behalf of the U.S. Government the remains of Sp4 Douglas A. Ross. After returning to Hawaii, the Central Identification Laboratory Hawaii (CILHI) conducted the final identification procedures. In December, the Secretary of the Army announced the recovery and identification of Sp4 Douglas A Ross. He was returned to his family in California in January 1998.

Currently, there are still 2,079 Americans listed as missing in action (MIA) throughout Southeast Asia (SEA). Vietnam has the largest number of missing 1,552 servicemen. About a third of the losses are in North Vietnam. These are primarily Air Force and Navy pilots shot down during attacks against military targets north of DMZ and Hanoi. The remaining losses are in the former South Vietnam. About half are helicopter and fixed-wing pilots shot down or crashed in support of ground combat. The remaining missing soldiers were lost in ground combat.

Ordinarily, the term "MIA" refers to wartime personnel who disappear in the fighting and whose fates are unknown. Listed as missing in World War II were 78,751 men, while in Korea 8,177

went unaccounted in Korean during the Korean Conflict. Acceptance of significant members of MIAs has not, however not the case with Vietnam MIAs. The U.S. government has chosen to classify all servicemen killed in action and their bodies not recovered as MIA.

Why is it that, unlike the two proceeding wars, there has been such an energetic call to determine the fate of the Vietnam MIAs? Several plausible explanations come quickly to mind: Since the war in Vietnam was increasingly unpopular and unsupported in the United States, the government has felt a tremendous obligation to "reduce" the travesty by responding positively to the embittered "Remember our MIAs" movement. Further, now dependent on our all-volunteer armed forces, U.S. leaders realize that it is critically important to support the force. So the on-going effort to fully account for missing service personnel in Southeast Asia has symbolic significance: It the government's commitment to our volunteer service members. Likewise, Vietnam veterans have felt very alienated, unappreciated, and essentially abandoned by the government that sent them to that war. Again, the government has sought to redeem itself by continuing to account for all lost servicemen in SEA. The same holds for the embittered families of missing serviceman; many of these families distrusted the government because of bureaucratic bungling of their efforts to find out what happened to their missing sons, brothers, or husbands. Finally, the circumstances of U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam precluded immediate efforts at accounting for MIAs. All these factors and more have created a public out-cry to account for all our Americans. As a result of this ongoing public concern, a goal of our national strategy in the region is tied to the fullest possible accounting for those lost in the war.

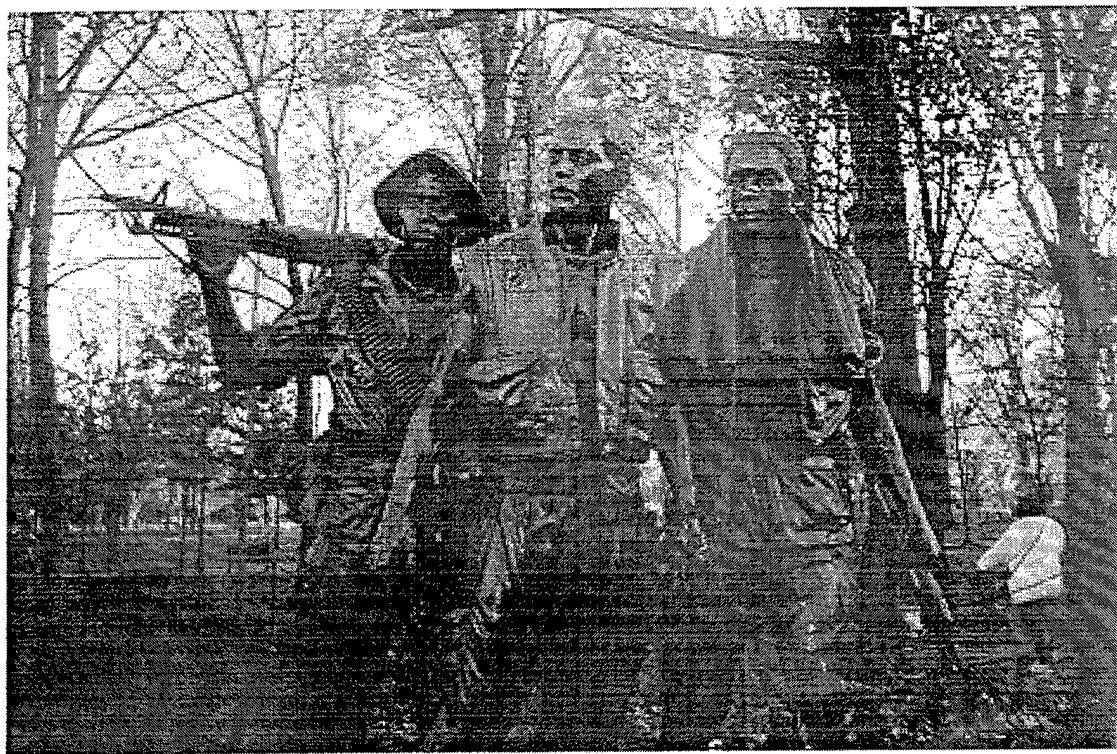


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United States Strategy for the Fullest Possible Accounting of U.S. Combatants in Southeast Asia

Foreword and Purpose

April 30, 1998 marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of the fall of Saigon, the end of U. S. military involvement in South Vietnam. At the close of the Vietnam War, the United States had lost approximately 58,123 soldiers killed in action, with 2,583 Americans still unaccounted for.¹ Since withdrawing, the U. S. government has sustained an unprecedented effort to achieve the fullest possible accounting for those lost. Currently 2,079 United States servicemen remain unaccounted for in all of Southeast Asia (SEA), 1552 of those in Vietnam. Although the United States has tried to maintain a diplomatic dialogue with the Vietnamese government, we have not maintained a consistent policy.

This study examines the effectiveness of the current United States diplomatic strategy of engagement, especially the goal of promoting Vietnamese cooperation in assisting our efforts to account for Americans missing in action (MIAs). This study demonstrates that U. S. National Security Strategy of engagement with Vietnam has enhanced efforts to achieve the fullest possible accounting.

During the period June 30, 1997 through July 7, 1998, I had the privilege to serve as the Detachment Two Commander Joint Task Force Full Accounting (JTF-FA) in Hanoi. Throughout my tenure, visiting congressional delegations repeatedly posed four questions: 1) How effective is the U.S. strategy of engagement in contemporary Vietnam? 2) How much cooperation are we getting

from the Vietnamese in our efforts to fully account for Americans still missing? 3) How has the appointment of Ambassador Douglas (Pete) Peterson affected the level of Vietnamese cooperation? 4) When can this sustained effort be reasonably completed?

My personal experiences as the Detachment Two Commander in Hanoi provides most of the evidence used in this study. This paper will assess Vietnamese cooperation Using the four criteria initially established by the Bush Administration. It will finally serve to describe the progress the U. S. government has made during my tenure with the JTF-FA.

National Security Policy

Since the breakup of the Soviet Union the United States has embarked on a Nation Security Strategy for the 21st Century of global engagement. This strategy recognizes the changing world environment while it attempts to maximize opportunities to enhance our national security.²³

Over the past five years, the Clinton Administration has attempted to enhance national security through diplomacy, monetary assistance, arms control, military regional activities, environmental initiatives, and international law enforcement cooperation. The overarching United States strategic goal is to produce a more secure world through global integration. In a more secure world, the United States can achieve specific regional objectives.⁴

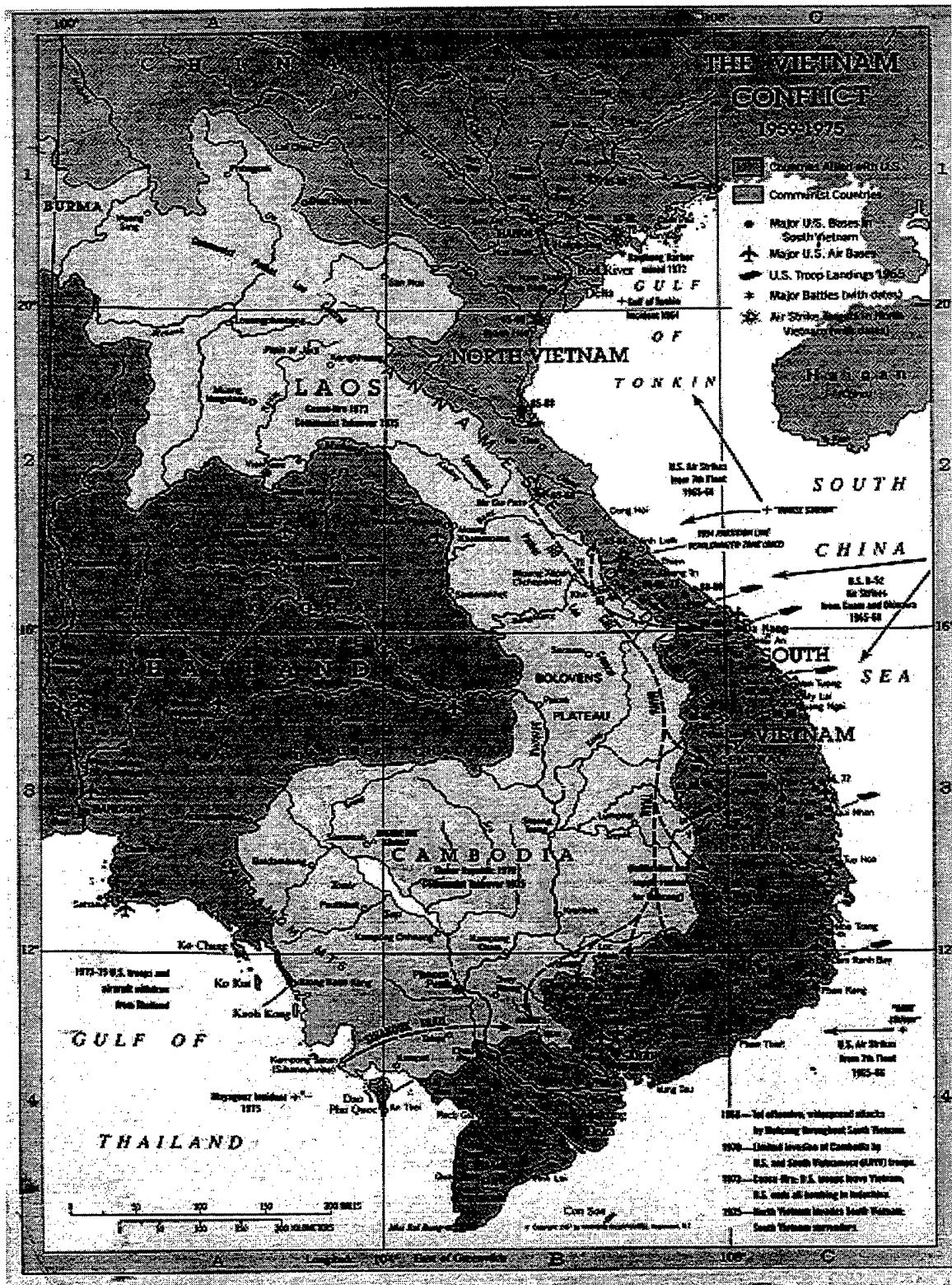


Fig.2 VIETNAM CONFLICT 1959 - 1975

The 1997 and 1998 National Security Strategy cites the following:

To enhance our security with effective diplomacy and with military forces that are ready to fight and win; to bolster American's economic prosperity; to promote democracy.⁵

The United States must also be ready to respond to national and international threats and crises. Weapons of mass destruction, transnational threats, terrorism, international crime and drug trafficking all threaten national and world security. To combat these forces, the United States must develop international coalitions against these destabilizing forces. We must as well be prepared and willing to use all appropriate instruments of national power to influence the actions of other states and non-state actors. On some occasions, we must also be willing to act alone to achieve our national security objectives and to ensure the safety of the nation.⁶

To implement the global strategy, the United States has employed an integrated regional approach to effectively shape and respond to the spectrum of potential situations. This methodology enables United States to tailor strategy to the full range of regional challenges and conditions. As part of the story of accounting for American servicemen This study will examine the effectiveness of this strategy in Southeast Asia and Vietnam.⁷

Nation Security Strategy in SEA

As the 21st century approaches, SEA is changing politically, economically, socially, and militarily. Many of these changes are the result of the withdrawal of the Soviet Union from the region, of Asian economic crises, and of emerging US-Sino relations.⁸ The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was founded in 1967 to create a stable environment free of external interference and intra-regional strife. ASEAN nations pledged to promote regional security in order to eliminate external power involvement, to enhance economic development, and to improve security relationships within the region. Globalization has also profoundly affected the nations of this region. The desire to become a full-fledged member of the global society is strong among the nations of Southeast Asia. Many nations within the region have made substantial progress toward democratization. In cases such as Indonesia, corruption, mismanagement, and authoritarianism have caused political unrest and worsened the nation's economic crisis. Despite the turbulence, ASEAN members are exhibiting a new level of confidence and assertiveness.⁹

The United States has been the preeminent power in the Pacific since World War II. Our military presence has been essential to maintaining peace and stability.¹⁰ Although the United States withdrew from Vietnam in April 1975, we have remained an active partner in the region, committed to its security. Peace and stability of SEA are conducive to our own economic growth. Through mutually beneficial security dialogue and economic partnerships with the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the ASEAN countries (Thailand, Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam), the United States has maintained a cooperative and collective approach to

regional security. In time these regional forums will enhance diplomatic efforts, improve cooperation, and democratization among the member nations within the region.¹¹

Vietnamese Security Outlook

The Vietnamese view security in comprehensive terms. For them security is not a matter of protecting sovereignty and territorial integrity, although these are essential elements. Security also embraces protection of national political, economic, and social systems and the physical environment. Moreover, areas national security is inseparable from regional and even global security and cannot be achieved except in cooperation with other nations. The Vietnamese government has realized that it must reduce the risk of regional tensions in order to pursue economic and domestic reforms. This has led to an emphasis on economic renovation and to strengthening Vietnam's bilateral and regional relations to provide a peaceful, supportive environment for economic renovation.¹² To reduce regional tensions, the 6th Party Congress has rejuvenated its efforts at normalizing relations with the United States and China and at establishing economic ties with Japan.¹³ Since 1990, Vietnam has pursued an "open door" policy aimed at increasing access to world markets, international assistance, and foreign investment.¹⁴ In 1995, Vietnam joined ASEAN and the Asian Regional Forum (ARF) in an order to integrate itself into the global economy and to join in mutual defense dialogue.¹⁵

United States Diplomatic Efforts

Following months of difficult negotiations by the Nixon Administration, on January 27, 1973, the Soviet Republic of Vietnam and the United States signed the Paris Peace Accords.¹⁶ The terms of the proposal called for: an internationally supervised cease-fire; the return and accounting of prisoners; continuation of economic and military aid to South Vietnam; and leaving the political future of South Vietnam to be settled by the Vietnamese based on free elections.¹⁷ The accords left no clear winners or losers and led not to reconciliation, but to continuing suspicion and prolonged adversarial relations.

The communist government had no intention of ever observing the terms of the peace accords. The goal of the Hanoi government was to reunite Vietnam. In the fall of 1974, the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN), under command of General Giap, launched the final campaign to invade South Vietnam. The South Vietnamese government capitulated on April 30, 1975. The day Saigon fell, the United States terminated all diplomatic relations with the government of North Vietnam. Within a year, the Hanoi government had fully annexed the south.¹⁸ Over the next few years the United States government continued its efforts to re-establish diplomatic relations with Vietnam and account for Americans missing.

In the 1980s, the United States and Vietnam developed and sustained a diplomatic dialogue on a range of humanitarian issues, in particular on a matter which the United States deemed the highest national priority: fullest possible accounting for

missing servicemen. As early as the Ford Administration, the United States policy of the fullest possible accounting was established as the precondition for any kind of normalization.¹⁹ The Vietnamese and United States agreed these issues would be discussed as a separate humanitarian agenda without reference to political differences. Following the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in 1986, the United States once again terminated all discussions on normalizing relations with Hanoi.

United States Re-engagement Strategy

In 1985 President Ronald Reagan began efforts to reestablish relations with Vietnam. He announced that Vietnam had withdrawn from Cambodia and United States fully cooperate in the accounting of our MIAs. With the overwhelming support of Congress, he directed that all normalization initiatives would be linked to accounting efforts. If the Vietnamese government failed to cooperate, all other diplomatic efforts would be cancelled. In 1986, President Reagan appointed retired General John Vessey, Jr., special POW/MIA emissary to Hanoi. He was dispatched to Hanoi in February 1987. Through subsequent negotiations, General Vessey established the humanitarian framework for future accounting efforts.²⁰

Vessey's appointment significantly changed the United States relationship with the government of Vietnam. As a result of his negotiations, the United States established the foundations for future field investigations and excavations. Over the next four years, the United States conducted recovery operations throughout the country. The remains of 122 were identified. With the final withdrawal of Vietnamese forces from

Cambodia, the last hurdle to discussions concerning normalization was removed. On September 29, 1990, Secretary of State James Baker met with Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach met to discuss United Nations efforts to guarantee a neutral Cambodia. As a result of successes in accounting efforts and with Cambodian neutrality, Secretary Baker and Minister Thach met again in April to develop a "road map" to normalization. The United States agreed to lift restrictions imposed on American business and veterans groups wanting to travel to Vietnam. Later initiatives would include lifting the trade embargo and removal of opposition to international lending. Vietnam then agreed to increase its efforts in accounting for missing United States servicemen.²¹ As a direct result of these initiatives, the United States established the first permanent Missing Persons Office in Hanoi, July 7, 1991. Since then, this Office has remained the focal point of United States recovery operations.²²

In 1991, President Bush directed the Department of Defense to establish a military command responsible "for resolving the cases of Americans still unaccounted-for as a result of the Southeast Asian conflict through investigation, archival research and remains-recovery operations." In January 1992, United States Pacific Command established Joint Task force Full-Accounting (JTF-FA).²³ Thus began the most intensive effort to account for a nation's accounted-for warriors, an initiative unprecedented in the history In January 1992, United States Pacific Command established Joint Task force Full-Accounting (JTF-FA).²⁴ Thus began the most intensive effort to account for a nation's accounted-for warriors, an initiative unprecedented in the history of warfare.

Clinton Administration

In March 1992, President Clinton validated former President Bush's four areas for requiring tangible evidence of Vietnamese progress as a precondition to normalization: (1) repatriation and identification of remains, (2) access to documents, (3) trilateral (U.S., Laos, and Vietnam) cooperation, and (4) progress in resolving priority cases and live-sighting investigations, and support for joint field activities (JFAs).²⁵ President Clinton continued to pursue these areas as the normalization processes matured. In June 1993, with evidence of full Vietnamese cooperation on full-accounting, the National Security Council (NSC) advised President Clinton to end United States opposition to Vietnam's access to international finance. In July, President Clinton announced that Washington would no longer oppose Vietnam's request to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to refinance debts.²⁶ On January 28, 1994, the Senate voted (68 to 32) to remove the trade embargo. On February 3, 1994, President Clinton stated:

Today I am lifting the trade embargo against Vietnam because I am absolutely convinced it offers United States the best way to resolve the fate of those who remain missing and about whom we are not sure.²⁷

Following a recommendation from Secretary of State Warren Christopher, President Clinton granted Hanoi full diplomatic recognition on July 11, 1995.²⁸ On August 6, 1995, Secretary

Christopher reopened the American Embassy in Vietnam after 20 years. He immediately urged the Vietnamese government to improve its human-rights policies and introduce market reforms.²⁹

In March 1997, Douglas (Pete) Peterson, a former Democratic Congressman from Florida, was appointed Ambassador to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV). President Clinton could not have selected a more qualified and experienced statesman. A former Vietnam Veteran and POW, Peterson had spent six and half years in the infamous Hanoi Hilton. As a congressman, he had served as a member of the House Sub-Committee on POW/MIA issues. Throughout his tenure in Congress, he had been a strong advocate of President Bush's efforts to normalize relations with Vietnam. Upon arriving in Hanoi he has worked diligently to encourage Vietnamese cooperation in accounting for the MIAs. He established valuable personal ties with the Vietnamese leadership. These relationships are paying dividends on many issues of importance to future United States Vietnamese relations.³⁰

On March 4, 1998, President Clinton declared that the Vietnamese had been "cooperating fully in good faith". This was the third time that the President has validated Vietnam's cooperation.³¹ On July 30, 1998, in an attempt to challenge the President's determination, Congressman Dana Rohrabacher (R-Cal) introduced legislation (HJ Res. 120) to prevent further steps toward normalizing economic relations with Vietnam. After a persuasive campaign by Clinton supporters, including Ambassador Peterson's, the resolution was defeated 260-163.³²

Assessing Vietnamese Cooperation

Since 1992 Joint Task Force - Full Accounting has been the focal point for the U.S. government's efforts to gain the fullest possible accounting. I had the remarkable experience of commanding Detachment Two of the Joint Task Force from Jun 30, 97 to Jul 7, 1998.

Recently, the Pentagon announced the identification of the remains of two more servicemen. Currently, 2,079 Americans remain unaccounted for in SEA. Of that number, 1,552 were unaccounted for in Vietnam.³³



Fig.3 RECOVERY CASE 0075 MeKong Delta

Joint Task Force-Full Accounting (JTF-FA) has developed joint investigation, excavation and unilateral investigation programs to obtain answers and information on unaccounted for Americans. During my tenure as the Detachment Two Commander, JTF-FA conducted five joint field activities (JFAs) in Vietnam. We completed over 200 investigations and made over 40 excavations. Joint United States/Vietnamese Teams operating in Vietnam repatriated approximately 37 sets of remains believed to be those of unaccounted for Americans.

In 1992, JTF-FA conducted five JFAs in Vietnam, each with about 55 U.S. personnel. These early teams had to face many operational and logistical limitations. In 1998-99, the Task Force averages five 30-35 day JFAs per year, conducted by 90-100 U.S. specialists who operate in eight or more investigation/recovery teams. The teams enjoy increasing latitude and Vietnamese support in accomplishing the mission. As a result of combined U.S./Vietnamese efforts, remains believed to represent 233 Americans have been returned to the United States since January 1992. The Central Identification Laboratory in Hawaii is continually identifying Americans previously unaccounted for.

During my tenure as the Detachment Commander, we developed with the Vietnamese government a comprehensive unilateral investigation program. Unilateral actions involve those cases that require host nation specialists to obtain information, which can then be followed up jointly. Responding to U.S. pressure, the Vietnamese Office Seeking Missing Persons (VNOSMP) developed a plan to systematically investigate unilateral investigation requirements prior to each JFA. In January 1997, JTF-FA eliminated one scheduled JFA to allow Vietnamese investigators time to work unilaterally. In August 1997 meeting with the VNOSMP, JTF-FA's reviewed the concept, goals and

objectives of the unilateral investigation program. In addition to establishing specific periods for investigation, we agreed to prioritize investigation requirements and provide immediate feedback. There were two unilateral investigation periods during my tenure as the Detachment Two Commander. We received 73 unilateral reports during my tour, for a total of 156 reports under this initiative. Unilateral investigation periods are now included in JTF-FA yearly operational plans.

In general, the most recent Vietnamese unilateral investigation reports demonstrate a significant effort to carry out the specific actions requested by DPMO and JTF-FA analysts. The reports are generally quite detailed, well-researched, and coherently presented. The Vietnamese appear willing to pursue leads generated during their own investigations and to offer suggestions regarding future steps to resolve these cases. Their attitude and cooperation in helping to develop the unilateral program is commendable.

We have also established an oral history program through which numerous interviews of Vietnamese veterans and government officials have been conducted in addition to the several hundred interviews conducted as part of the Joint Field Activities. Further, the Vietnamese are conducting unilateral investigations based on leads provided by the United States. Vietnam has already completed three successful unilateral investigations periods and was scheduled to conduct three more during late 1998 and early 1999.

We continue to gain direct access to most documents. In cases where information is restricted, the Vietnamese have provided effective work-arounds. The Vietnamese have shared the results of searches by their own teams. We continue to work with the VNOSMP in an attempt to get them to refine their reporting and analysis. To their credit, they are responding to

our advice and continue to acknowledge that detachment assistance helps.³⁴

The trilateral investigation program has proven an unqualified success. To date we have brought 26 Vietnamese veterans into Laos to investigate 23 incidents during 11 separate field activities. These witnesses have provided significant information on eight cases, which has led to the excavation of four sites and recovery of remains associated with two cases. Four additional sites in Laos, identified by Vietnamese witnesses, are scheduled for excavation. In Cambodia, five Vietnamese witnesses have assisted in the investigation of three cases, leading to a successful excavation in one case.

In March 1998, Admiral Joseph Prueher, Commander-in-Chief (CINC) U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM), testified before the House Committee concerning Vietnamese cooperation:

The SRV Government continues to cooperate on the POW/MIA effort. Vietnamese support to JFAs remains good. Field operations are progressing well and will continue as scheduled. Trilateral operations between the Vietnamese, Cambodians, and United States began in Feb 97 and initial results are promising. Much progress has been made on confirming the fates and accounting for individuals on the last known alive list. Of the original 196 individuals, the fate of only 48 individuals is yet to be confirmed. The Vietnamese are also continuing efforts to locate individuals with valuable first-hand information relating to cases of unaccounted for Americans. Vietnamese witnesses have provided vital information, which resulted in recovery of remains in Laos.

The SRV Government has turned over more than 150 documents. Vietnam also allowed United States teams to review thousands of archival items in museums and other government offices. These documents and items have provided a significant number of correlations. In response to unilateral case leads which were

provided to Vietnam from January-May 1996, the VNOSMP have provided written reports on 73 case investigations; 29 reports were receive in March 1997.³⁵

On August 27, 1998 the Central Intelligence Agency declassified the Nation Intelligence Estimate 98-03 (NIE 98-03), Vietnamese Intentions, Capabilities and Performance Concerning the POW/MIA Issue. This document has enhanced the public's understanding of United States-Vietnamese cooperation. It states:

Since the early 1990s, we have seen evidence of increased Vietnamese cooperation on the POW/MIA issue in the strengthened staffing, increased responsiveness, and growing professionalization of the Vietnamese organizations that deal with this issue.³⁶

Consequently, we judge that Vietnam has become more helpful in assisting United States efforts to achieve the fullest possible accounting of American personnel, we rate Vietnamese cooperation as excellent.³⁷

VIETNAMESE COOPERATION

Element	Level of Cooperation	Comments
JOINT FIELD ACTIVITIES; RECOVeries	Excellent	Has been improving since early 1990s; improving professionalism on part of Vietnamese
Trilateral Investigations	Good	Vietnamese working hard to obtain Laotian cooperation in recovery efforts
Provide Documents	Good	Vietnamese have provided numerous documents but probably are holding out on those that would embarrass the government, personal artifacts, and equipment.
Making officials available for interviews	Fair to Good	Some retired officials resist interviews.
Live Sightings Investigations	Good	Reluctant, but Vietnamese resent live-sighting investigations and question their utility

Table 1

Conclusion

How effective is the U.S. strategy of engagement in contemporary Vietnam? I believe this study demonstrates our engagement strategy with Vietnam has produced a high level of cooperation, which could not have been accomplished through any other manner. On April 30, 1975, the last U.S. diplomats left the roof of the U.S. Embassy in Saigon. This marked the end of Vietnam War and the beginning of a new period in United States Vietnamese relations. From 1975 through the mid 1980's, the United States attempted to isolate Vietnam from the remainder of the free world. As a result, only handfuls of missing Americans were returned to their families. In 1986, President Reagan reinitiated contacts with the Vietnamese to discuss accounting efforts. President Clinton's subsequent strategy to engage the Vietnamese government, a continuation of the Reagan-Bush initiatives, has effectively enhanced efforts to achieve the fullest possible accounting of missing Americans. It also contributes to and regional security.

At the end of hostilities in 1973, 2,583 Americans were unaccounted for. To date 2,079 Americans remain unaccounted for in SEA. Since 1993, we have conducted 30 joint field activities throughout Vietnam. This has led to the return of 281 sets of remains believed to be Americans; 104 were subsequently

identified as previously unaccounted for Americans. The Vietnamese have also provided 115 unilaterally investigated case reports, 28,000 archival items and photographs, and 300 wartime documents. Over 195 Vietnamese citizens have participated in oral history interviews and 32 Vietnamese witnesses have accompanied U.S. recovery teams to Laos.

Cooperation is a two-way street. As the Vietnamese have worked with United States to account for our missing, we have moved forward to normalize diplomatic relations. The United States is now engaged with the Vietnamese across a broad spectrum of bilateral and transnational issues. The U.S. goal is to develop a normal relationship with Vietnam that is like our relationships with the other ASEAN countries, putting the past behind. The key to achieving this goal is to continue the close cooperation on POW/MIA accounting that has made possible the progress in normalization over the years. And progress in normalization strengthens our cooperation in accounting for missing Americans. These ties have created a positive force for regional stability.

How much cooperation are we getting from the Vietnamese in our efforts to fully account for Americans still missing in Southeast Asia?

On March 4, 1998, President Clinton issued a determination that Vietnam has been "cooperating fully in good faith" with

United States to account for our missing Americans. This was the third time that the President has validated Vietnam's cooperation. This assessment was also supported by Admiral Puerher, CINC USPACOM, and the Central Intelligence Agency National Intelligence Estimate 98-03. My experience on the ground verifies President Clinton's assessment.

During my tenure the Vietnamese Office Seeking Missing Persons (VNOSMP), the Vietnamese government agency responsible for United States Vietnamese operations, adequately supported all joint field activities. They also implemented two major initiatives to demonstrate a new level of commitment to improve Vietnamese unilateral efforts. During one joint field activity, we were not permitted to excavate two sites because of local sensitivities. To overcome these obstacles, the VNOSMP organized a Vietnamese unilateral team to excavate the sites. To insure that scientific standards were met, the team was augmented with an American anthropologist, mortuary affairs specialist and translator. Both sites were excavated without antagonizing local sensitivities. This was the first time the Vietnamese had attempted an unilateral excavation. To improve Vietnamese unilateral investigations, JTF-FA and VNOSMP established a new strategy to improve investigations and reports. The Vietnamese appear willing to pursue leads generated during their own investigations and to offer

suggestions regarding future steps to resolve cases. Their attitude and cooperation in helping to develop the unilateral program is commendable. Both of these initiatives demonstrate a new level of support.

How has the appointment of Ambassador Peterson effected the level of Vietnamese cooperation?

Ambassador Peterson has improved relations with the Vietnamese government in many areas of U.S. interest. He has forged valuable ties with Vietnam's leadership. As a former POW, he has unique credibility and demonstrates his commitment to the issue every day. Throughout Vietnam the people know the story of his captivity and incarceration in Hanoi. He has personally brought a sense of healing between the U.S. and Vietnamese people. He has also had a positive effect on the number of reports from Vietnamese citizens wanting to provide information. In 1998 my office received 117 reports from local citizens. This was a 30% increase from the previously year. He has also initiated an information program in which I personally briefed the People's Committees of major cities Ho Chi Min City (formerly Saigon), Da Nang, Hue, and Hanoi concerning U.S. recovery operations in Vietnam. As a result local officials better understand the humanitarian nature of our operations. The Ambassador has also had a positive effect on United States business and government officials visiting Vietnam. He makes

sure that each congressional delegation understands that, when speaking with the Vietnamese government, it must stress the importance of achieving full accounting. As a result of his efforts, Vietnamese cooperation should continue to improve.

When can this sustained effort to achieve full accountability be reasonably completed?

Currently there are 2,079 Vietnam, 8,100 Korean and 78,000 World War II MIA's. The Department of Defense is conducting recovery operations throughout the world to bring home missing Americans. Approximately 90% of the U.S. effort is directed at recovering those lost in SEA. The American military will continue to conduct recoveries until the government directs otherwise. The final determination of full accountability is not a military policy decision, but a decision to be made by the Congress, veterans, and the people of America. Ambassador Peterson once said: "We will be looking for MIAs for the next hundred years."

From my experience in Vietnam, the cases are getting much more difficult to solve. Time is not on our side. Witnesses are dying, the minerals in soil are destroying the remains, and the terrain is changing. The reality is that we will not be able to solve every case. We have already identified 568 cases in which we will not find remains. Technology has enhanced our efforts. In 1998, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier was opened

and the remains of 1LT Michael J. Blassie (USAF) were identified by DNA. In 1972, LT. Blassie had died in a crash of an A-37 near An Loc, South Vietnam.³⁸ During a POW/MIA delegation visit to Vietnam in 1986, his remains were unilaterally returned to U.S. officials. At that time, the technology was not available to forensic experts to identify these remains. Current technology will prolong our efforts. But there will come a time when we can do no more. The American people alone will determine the fullest possible accounting. Only God will know the rest.

ENDNOTES

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² William J. Clinton, A National Security Strategy for a New Century (Washington D.C.: The White House, 1997), iii.

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